

Ocean Exploration Advisory Board
A Federal Advisory Committee Act Board

22 May 2018

RDML Timothy Gallaudet, USN (ret.)
Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (acting)
and Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere

Dear Admiral Gallaudet:

On behalf of the Ocean Exploration Advisory Board (OEAB), I want to thank you for your staunch support of the Ocean Exploration and Research (OER) Program. We agree that OER plays a very important role in improving our understanding of the oceans and increasing awareness of the crucial importance of oceans to our nation and to the health of our planet.

We compliment OER on their significant accomplishments:

- The Oceanography supplement, *New Frontiers in Ocean Exploration*, does an outstanding job of highlighting achievements in 2017. The accomplishments are both meaningful and diverse. Further, they demonstrate outstanding outreach and leveraging of funds by partnering with other organizations, such as Ocean Exploration Trust (OET) and Schmidt Ocean Institute.
- The contribution of OER to mapping the EEZ is also significant. More than 50% of the multibeam data available have been provided by OER. These mapping data are of high value to our nation and are fundamental for developing the US Blue Economy.
- Planning for the upcoming National Ocean Exploration Forum NOEF 2018, to be held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab on 8 – 10 November this fall, is well along. We congratulate OER on selecting public engagement as the theme for NOEF 2018. The Forum's goal is to increase public awareness of the oceans by 1) rebranding the ocean to be open and inclusive; 2) imagining creative new ways to make the ocean pervasive in modern culture; and 3) empowering a diverse global community of ocean explorers. These goals are extremely timely and critical to promote collaboration among the many organizations currently working independently to increase awareness of the oceans.

In the meeting you and I had on 9 May, you asked for the OEAB's advice and recommendations regarding ocean exploration. In this regard, the OEAB offers the following in the context of advancing NOAA's role as lead agency for a national ocean exploration program. In particular, we believe partnerships have played and will continue to play an essential role in ocean exploration.

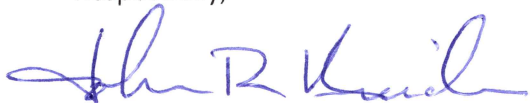
- *National Ocean Exploration Forum:* For NOEF 2019, we recommend a focus on "Ocean Exploration for the Blue Economy." We know this is an important priority for NOAA, and we believe the topic is extremely timely. This would be a great venue for representatives from industry, government, and academia to develop ideas on how to foster and accelerate growth in this area. We note the topic fits very well with the *U.S. Department of Commerce Strategic Plan*,

2018 – 2022, and could be a key driver to accomplish the first three strategic goals identified in the Plan: to accelerate American leadership, to enhance job creation, and to strengthen U.S. economic and national security.

- *Blue Economy*: Ocean exploration is integral to advancing the Blue Economy. To accelerate development of the Blue Economy, we believe it is critical for NOAA to actively engage with industry. Other government agencies place high value on industry as an important partner in achieving their objectives. These agencies rely on a sustained engagement to develop and maintain healthy industry partnerships. It has proven very successful in the past for multiple government agencies, and we believe such innovative thinking is critical for fostering the Blue Economy. NOAA has a unique opportunity to take a leadership role in this regard, particularly with developing and proving intelligent and adaptive technologies for next generation ocean exploration in new, innovative ways.
- *Partnership with NASA*: OEAB commends OER for supporting the new partnership with NASA to use *Ocean Exploration* to help guide future *Ocean World* missions. Such collaboration offers benefits in terms of increased public awareness and technology development, which can rapidly advance exploration and understanding in all ocean environments. To match burgeoning activity at the grass-roots level among scientists and engineers, we recommend pursuing complementary formal interagency relationships between NOAA OER and NASA Astrobiology programs.
- *Federal Strategy for Critical Minerals*: Executive Order 13817 regarding “A Federal Strategy to Ensure Secure and Reliable Supplies of Critical Minerals” provides an opportunity for a collaborative initiative between the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and NOAA to accomplish the Executive Order’s important objectives. In addition to preserving U.S. sovereign interests in deep ocean mineral resources, such a collaboration would accelerate characterization of both living and mineral resources within the U.S. EEZ, including critical minerals and sensitive habitats. Such a joint initiative today would parallel the very productive Joint Office for Mapping and Research (JOMAR) established in 1984 through a memorandum of understanding between NOAA and USGS.

The next OEAB meeting will focus on ocean exploration technology. The meeting is scheduled for 25 – 26 September at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. We invite you to attend, discuss your priorities, and engage the OEAB members in dialogue about how the OEAB can best support you.

Respectfully,



John R. Kreider
Chair, NOAA Ocean Exploration Advisory Board